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FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9412
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 6180
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI 3028
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1589
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1767
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIASS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
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DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA, DS/IP/SPC/SO, AF/E,
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/30/2028

TAGS: MOPS PGOV PREL PINR ER

SUBJECT: MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN ASSAB REGION

Classified By: Ronald K. McMullen for Reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (S/NF) RSO Source stated he met with a friend who is a soldier stationed in the port city of Assab and in Asmara on leave. He stated the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) recently received 110 new tanks that are deployed along the border regions near Assab (NFI).

¶2. (S/NF) The soldier stated Major General Samuel Haile aka "China" (force commander in the Assab region), recently held a briefing with a large number of Eritrean soldiers and stated Eritrea would commence combat operations against Ethiopia to reclaim the land it was awarded by the EEBC. China stated the UN and the West are refusing to pressure Ethiopia to give this land to Eritrea, and Eritrea's only other option was to take it back by force. He told the soldiers they were ready and war would start soon.

¶3. (S/NF) Many soldiers complained to China that they had been mobilized for ten years with poor pay and lack of food and shelter. They stated their families are starving and they should be demobilized since the land had been awarded to Eritrea and the border crisis has been resolved. They also stated they would not fight if war broke out with Ethiopia.

¶4. (S/NF) China reportedly became furious after hearing this. In a meeting later that evening, he told his officers to closely monitor their soldiers, continue shooting any soldiers who desert, and if conflict erupts, to shoot any soldiers who refuse to fight. (Note: Source was not sure if this briefing was an attempt to keep the troops motivated because of their long deployment along the border, or if China truly believed war to be imminent. End Note.)

MCMULLEN